

SINEWS OF WAR

By Annie Eliot Trumbull

ILLUSTRATIONS BY W. T. BENDA



It was haymaking time in Gnadenfest. The valley lay at the foot of the Karer Pass, and upon its near horizon rose the peaks of the Dolomites. About the scattered houses of the tiny village stretched the fields of harvest, warm in the sunlight—a sunlight so warm in the Austrian Tyrol that it would seem to make the very snows of the glaciers glow into incandescence. These fields were flecked with the color of the haymakers—men and women, but for the most part women—flushed with labor, laughing in the sun, gay with the gladness of accomplishment. In their white bodices, their bright-colored petticoats, and their brighter-colored aprons, their heads bound with brilliant kerchiefs, the girls and women spread and tossed the hay, or even swung a scythe with that swiftness of strength and achievement which makes a field of mowers as stirring as a march; dressed for the harvest-home of light opera, they were vital with the concentration of purpose. It was all so sunny that it seemed impossible that it could ever be overcast, so gay that it could never be saddened, so warm and alive that there could be no such things as cold and death.

From the hard, white road came the sound of approaching hoof-beats. There were many passers along this white road: villagers to and from the town, strangers—decorous English and rich Americans, for were not all Americans rich as all English were decorous?—on their way through the mountains. Work was not so pressing in the hay-fields but that one could pause an instant, handsome, brown, and unwearied, to look up, smiling, from beneath a scarlet kerchief; one woman, her bodice of black satin, her petticoat more gayly embroidered than those of the others, was a Madonna della Sedia, with a touch of the allegro of sun and laughter. She

stood leaning on her fork while the hoof-beats sounded nearer, and was the first to recognize the horses trotting into view with their stalwart driver. This time it was no peasant on his way to market, nor any Auslander touring the country: it was Anton Huttebach, driving his own two splendid horses, strong and gentle like Anton himself, which drew the comfortable, low-hung carriage as lightly as if it had been a racing sulky. He reined into the field and beckoned to the Madonna della Sedia, who dropped her fork and went over to him. The other haymakers nodded, and either went on with their work or stood watching the interview with that placid, rustic curiosity which is satisfied with its own exercise and does not demand significant results.

"Elsabetta," said Anton, the reins lying loosely in his careful hands as he leaned from his driver's seat to smile down into her uplifted eyes. "Two Amerikanerinnen have engaged me for the three days' drive. We go over the pass this afternoon, and it is best that we start within the hour. Get in, and I will take you home to give me a bit of Mittagessen."

"Schön!" said Elsabetta, and she turned back to call out a word of explanation. "And do they pay you well, Anton?" she asked as she turned again toward him.

"They pay me well," he assented. "And they are freundlich. I think," he added, "that usually the Americans have friendliness—they are like that."

Still Elsabetta paused, her foot on the step of the carriage.

"And they, Anton," and she gave a little nod toward the horses. "It is not too soon? They are not tired from the last time? They are rested?"

"Tired!" exclaimed Anton proudly. "That they are not. Get in and you will see! I will but say the word and we are there."

"I know they are strong—but it was a long way yesterday," she said apologetically as she sprang to his side, and the horses, released from their immobility, broke into a long, swift gait which certainly betokened no fatigue.

"You see," said Anton. But it was a moment only before he checked their speed. They had a long pull before them, and what mattered a minute or two more before they reached the low, white house with the odd eaves and the many windows? "But you are right, Elsabetta—yes—to think of the horses as always. You think about as much of Hans and Gretel as of Anton, is it not true?" he concluded, laughing, as she sprang down as lightly as she had stepped in.

"Why not?" she asked, with a lift of the brown Italian eyes from under the smooth white brow. "Are they not part of Anton, and were they not his dearest before I was?" Then she walked to their heads and petted them, while Gretel whinnied and Hans put his nose in her brown hand.

"Well, after all, they are good horses, hein?" said Anton, smiling broadly, unashamed of his commingled sentiments.

An hour later, his own snack partaken of, he was again taking up the reins, fodder for Hans and Gretel in the carriage, rubber blankets stowed, and everything ready.

"Auf Wiedersehen, Elsabetta," he said for the last time.

"Ade, ade, Anton!" and again she paused, the laughter of her eyes giving place for a moment to a faint shadow of anxiety as she reached up and laid her hands on his. "We shall not have war?—it is not true—all the talk—it will not be?"

"War!" he answered, "Nein, nein. A little lesson, perhaps, some time to Servia—who knows?—she is not polite, Servia. He was not much—the archduke"—and he gave a little shrug by way of tribute to the slain—"but it was not polite that which they did. But war!—no, I do not believe it—our Franz Josef, has he not seen enough war?—and the German Kaiser, he is a man of peace, too—does he not always say it?—nein, nein, my Elsabetta, no war this time!"

"But," and her hand did not leave his,

"if they mobilize—they say even now, in Deutschland——"

"Ach ja, Deutschland! When is it not mobilisiert—Deutschland! And Austria perhaps—a little—but war!—no. And if there is war, Elsabetta, Hans and Gretel, will they not bring me back to you safe and sound? Hans and Gretel and I, we will not forget thee—ade!"

This time she let him go, and he snapped his whip as he waved it in farewell, and the little plume in his Jaegerhut danced gayly down the road. She was still thoughtful as she went back into the house. Anton knew even better than she what he was to do and where he was to go in case war was declared—though he was not to go on the first call—and as for Hans and Gretel—they were so wise, perhaps they knew, too—it is true that they were very wise! But it could not be—it was as Anton said—the Emperor he was too old and too sad to want war again in his day—and as for the German Kaiser, was he not always talking of peace?—natürlich, there would be no war!—and, throwing back her pretty head in a long breath of pure enjoyment of the sunny, perfumed air of noon as she came out of the house again, she closed the door behind her and went back trippingly to the hay-field for the afternoon.

Meanwhile Anton had picked up the Amerikanerinnen, and they were climbing the road to the pass. For hours they mounted toward the sky—a sky which hung over them in a sort of breathlessness of beauty and lucidity. It was so lovely that one felt as if the slightest jar must shatter something precious, that some detail of the vision might slip or tremble from its place, that the foaming waters might be arrested in the perfection of their swirl and plunge, that the shining duskiness of the green forests might thin and scatter, that the glorious white of the glaciers might tarnish, that the blue and purple and pink of the hillsides and fields might droop and dull, that the splendid road itself, as it bridged cataracts and lost itself in rock galleries and emerged again into blinding sunshine, might suddenly yawn into a chasm or lose itself upon a brink. It was a vision of that perfection which makes the human heart stand still in fear of its eclipse.

At the first long ascent Hans and Gretel had settled themselves steadily to their work and Anton had swung himself off the box and tramped beside them.

"He begins early to save his horses," said one of the Americans.

"And it is not a very heavy load, either," responded the other.

Once, that first day, they came to a bit of road that was nearly level. It skirted a magnificent wall of rock, while on the other side the mountain fell steeply to the stream—for ever about them was the sound of rushing waters, rivers green and rivers gray, rivers almost colorless—snow-waters from the neighboring glaciers, pallid with the cold—all hurrying madly as only Alpine rivers hurry. Here, where the stream lifted its voice from far below, steep precipices shut them in; before and behind them the road seemed abruptly to begin and end—end at a bridge beneath which a cataract plunged and whitened in the dimness of the daylight—a daylight tempered almost to gloom by the high hilltops. On this comparative level Anton climbed to the box and rode for a half-mile, regarding with unwinking satisfaction the easy stride of his bays. It was then that Hans took a slight advantage, accruing from the fact that he had succeeded in getting his tail over the reins, and proceeded to kick a section off the dashboard. For a moment it looked as if the incident might result in something like permanent distrust. To the Amerikanerinnen it seemed prophetic of possible disaster and indicative of too much temperament on the part of Hans. But Anton, after the first moment of prompt activity, took it so calmly, he so swiftly and so securely mended the subordinate strap that Hans's inadvertence had broken, and surveyed the splintered dashboard in such absence of bitterness, that they at once fell into what was evidently his own opinion, that it had been, to be sure, a little careless of Hans, but that no great harm had been done in the present and that it held absolutely no dark presage for the future. In fact, save for the rift, and consequently revelation of the unpainted wood of the dashboard, an incongruity which gave Anton opportunity to play at diplomatic negotiation at several rest-houses on the route, the incident was

closed. They soon got to know Hans so well that they estimated his carelessness at its true value; as for Gretel, she had never flickered into mutiny for an instant. Anton smilingly proffered what was undoubtedly a perfectly adequate explanation, but, like all the spoken communication between the members of the party, considered from the point of view of a document in the case, it lost something, through a difference in tongues, of the more elusive niceties of expression, though from the first there had been between the three that entire understanding of both the physical and mental moods of the moment which goes deeper than the exigencies of speech and makes clear any clumsiness of verbal statement. This gentle-voiced Anton, with his ready smile, his quick perception of inclination, his prompt measures, and his patient execution—why was it necessary that he should find English at his tongue's end? And Anton, on his part, soon found a certain swiftness of realization and an ungrudging delight in his country's beauty, with a flexibility in adjustment to circumstance, which made for the easy establishment of an *entente cordiale*.

"You see, Hans did not understand," he explained; "he does not always understand, Hans. But there is no evil in him. Gretel, she is different—and she holds back—because she sees," and as he walked beside him he petted the brown flanks of the somewhat confused Hans as if to make up to him for that slight social lapse and consequent embarrassment which sometimes betray the most well-meaning. Indeed, from that moment it appeared that the three had entered upon a tacit compact to entirely overlook, for the complete reassurance of Hans, the slip and its consequences. No one alluded to, or even glanced at, the rough aspect of the dashboard, and if, during a rest, one happened to come upon Anton engaged in the labor of emergency repairs, both parties ignored his occupation as though it were a thing superfluous and uncalled for. Thus was the charm of confident personal intercourse preserved intact.

More than once they halted at small, isolated inns, between the larger villages with their post hotels, and at each one of them there were exchanged a few words,

at least, about Hans and Gretel—words which never failed to redound, directly or indirectly, to their credit. Proprietors all along the Dolomite highway knew them, as they knew and liked Anton, and so when the distant mutterings of war—so distant and so incredible—had died out of the conversation there was admitted a note of peace and understanding. Once they paused for mid-morning refreshment at a little osteria planted in the midst of the forest. Under a primitive pergola of vines, by the side of the white road, the Americans sat at a round table and ate strawberries and cream brought them by a bright-eyed, bright-clad girl—those tiny wild strawberries that have the perfume of sun-warmed flowers!—while Anton within, in the Gastzimmer, smoked a cigarette, drank his foaming beer, and gossiped with the landlord.

"There is talk of war, is it not so?" said one of the Americans to the pretty Fräulein. She nodded.

"They are mobilizing," she said without enthusiasm, as she half-shrugged her shoulders, as Anton had done.

"Austria mobilizes, does she?" said the American. "Yes—but it is impossible that there should be war."

She had said it a number of times already, her mood remaining quite detached. Of course there would be no actual war—that was out of the question in this age—but mobilisieren—yes, perhaps—that seemed to be part of the game. Europeans were always playing at hostilities. It was so absolutely apart from hostilities, really, this sunny peace under dancing leaves—*sousigné* by strawberries and cream. This was the real thing—and talk about war was the artificial fever of diplomats.

"And the Amerikanerinnen, do they like Hans and Gretel?" asked the landlord good-naturedly, as he came out with Anton and helped with a buckle.

"Ja, ja, they understand," nodded Anton. "They have seen—why should they not have seen?" he exclaimed with justifiable pride. "Have they not come over the Karer without a stumble and without delay?"

"Ja wohl," agreed the landlord, "and they are not even breathed," and he slipped the Trinkgeld into his pocket and

settled the travelling-rugs more securely in their places. The carriage went on into the wonders, the exquisite, serene wonders, of the way, and ever before them, drawing nearer and nearer in their isolation, were the Dolomites themselves, castles and towers, monoliths and turrets, strange, inaccessible, unresponsive, white with snow; gray, as if covered with gray velvet of a heavy pile; soft, seamed, and fissured, touched with saffron and with rose, shadowed and accented with violet—dominant, serrated, fantastic.

On their way they passed other fields where other bright-skirted, bright-kierchiefed women were harvesting the hay, for it must be the women who gather into barns. Mobilizing—that hitherto somewhat unfamiliar word, beginning to be uttered with unconscious familiarity as of long acquaintance—mobilizing evidently meant something practical. Was it a fancy that the faces of the haymakers were a shade less glad than they had been the day before?—even though they still looked up and smiled? Perhaps. But it would be but a transient shade. It would all be over with the precaution of mobilizing. The civilized world would never go to war.

"There are moments," said one of the Americans meditatively, "when it seems to me that it is upon childhood that the shadow of mature anxiety has fallen with the most obvious effect. Did you ever see such funny little old children? Do you suppose they have aged in a single night?"

"They are certainly funny," returned the other, "but I don't believe it is the war. It is more apt to be father's coat and trousers, cut down, but not remodelled. Not to mention father's hat."

"Mother's cap and apron also add," agreed the first speaker. "And their cheeks are unblanched as yet."

Crimson-cheeked and solemn-eyed, the little Dolomite girls and boys stood in turns of the road or within the confines of garden fences and watched the strangers drive past, unchallenging and unwinking babies, dressed like burgomasters and burgomasters' wives.

"Give them some chocolate," said one of the strangers, "and see if they smile. They are eating it, silver paper and all,"

she added a moment later as she looked back; "but they have not smiled."

They were charming, these little children, weighed down as they were by the traditions and responsibilities of adult garments.

The day they went over the third pass one said to the other, as she looked, half-absently, at Anton, a sturdy figure with the usual cigarette in his mouth, as he forged steadily ahead by the side of Hans: "Do you realize that he has practically walked the whole distance over all three passes?"

"So he has," returned the other. "Anton," she said, "why do you always walk? You must be more tired than the horses."

"Nein, nein," he smiled. "I am not tired—nor is Hans, either," he added jealously, "nor Gretel. But they have to go back, you see," and again he patted the warm flanks as if to assure Hans that there was always some one near to see that justice was done and considerations taken into account.

Always climbing, they were drawing nearer to the summit of the pass. They had left the fields of flowers, the lovely, swift rushes of color which dyed the reticence of the unshaded meadows below the glaciers; above them the white-walled fastnesses of the road bulwarked the last of the mounting curves, which lost itself in the echoing chambers of a tunnel, only to emerge, after mysterious convolutions in the semi-dark, upon the highest level. Beside them the curious cattle, cropping the short herbage, hardy as themselves, wandered to the road to see them pass. Finally, they left behind them the last of the climbing curves, and their breath coming a little shorter in the rarefied air, they looked out, with a new thrilling sense of exultation, over the superb, outlying mountains of strange, tinted rock and glistening glaciers, and down into green valleys where the trees stood magnificently dense and the pale streams broke from their recesses.

After they had eaten luncheon in the dazzling chill of the summit, where a good-natured and unburrying German Frau distributed hot soup and eclectic stew to the guests of all nations, sitting about the bare Speisezimmer, and where a glassful of sour wine borrowed the intoxicating glow

of the true Falernian, they dropped down into the last valley. Anton was on the box now—the journey was nearly over, and Hans and Gretel were permitted a discreet trot down the gentler declivities of the descent.

"They know, is it not true?" Anton said, with a confident nod toward Hans and Gretel. They knew perfectly, there was no doubt of that. The hard part of the journey was over, but there were other passes and other journeys before them—had they not spent their lives in going over passes?—and this was no place for an abuse of privilege, at once perilous and premature.

Even upon the pristine calm of this remote valley there seemed to lie an unusual peace. As the sun dropped down to the mountain-tops, which rose so high to shield its disappearance, and which threw their long shadows athwart the warm dusk of the forests and the declining activities of the twilight, it was as if the very dove of peace were folding her soft wings to brood above its rest. And when, later on, the moon rose over the enchantment—when the village slept and the valleys dreamed in the dark, and only the mountains waked and watched in the serenity of everlasting strength, while the flood of the moonlight bathed their shoulders and flowed down to their feet, still the world was wrapped in a vision of perfect peace.

Early the next morning was the awakening. Before the moon had set, while yet the darkness lay dense in the depths of the mountains, at three o'clock of the dawn, rushing like the whirlwind of war itself, came into the courtyard of the inn an automobile, bringing the news that peace was at an end, and that the nations were arming themselves for battle.

"War! War! War!" it panted, as it paused a moment among the peasants of the inn. "War! War! War!" it shrieked like a modern Valkyr as it tore out of the courtyard, and, as it plunged into the night and the mountains, from the far distance came its humming monotone: "War! War! War!"

Anton was very apologetic when the Americans came out after their hasty breakfast, served by red-eyed women—five of the men had already left. He had had to rouse the Herrschaften an hour

earlier than had been agreed upon, because, you see, they must be carried to their destination, and then he must get back at once to Gnadenfest with Hans and Gretel. Hans and Gretel were *angemeldet*—they must be in readiness should they be called for. No, he should not have to go himself, this time, but Hans and Gretel—yes—if they were called out. But they would not be—no, he did not think it—only—and he leaned over to pat Hans—they must be ready. And truly Hans and Gretel had much to do to-day, and must do it quickly. Their hoofs rang more noisily and more swiftly on the hard road, and the carriage bowled along with fewer delays for rest and good-fellowship.

The same beauty waited upon their steps, still an unshattered vision, but if it was not jarred it was charged with something new—something anticipatory though undefined—the trail of that automobile which had rushed over that road a few hours earlier. There were groups of gray-coated soldiers about the inns; there were sharp-eyed sentries on the frontier who scanned the carriage and its occupants; there were stolid peasants trudging along with their bundles of clothing; and there were anxious women, their gay kerchiefs not much alleviating the terrors of their solicitude.

"Yes," said Anton, as he turned and leaned toward his passengers, "Hans and Gretel have been listed for long—with their stable and their owner—every good horse in Austria was known and stood waiting conscription—naturally Hans and Gretel would be—such horses, would they not be very useful in time of war? To draw cannon? Well, perhaps," and he paused an instant as if to grasp the possibility—"yes, or perhaps supplies—meat and bread. But, after all, it would soon be over—yes, Servia would have her lesson—ja, ja—perhaps she needed it; if Russia had not *cingetreten* there would not have been much trouble," he thought—"but Russia would see—yes—she would see."

There was nothing of the braggart in Anton's quiet manner and words; evidently he cared very little whether Servia had her lesson or not—or if Russia saw—but in the depths of his kind eyes, as he

watched Hans and Gretel cover the mountain spaces, there was lurking a great fear.

Early that afternoon they came to the end of their journey. Anton left the Americans at their hotel—a hostelry which preserved a forced air of comfort and adequacy, a would-be placidity, as of an existence something supernal, above the disturbing currents of war, by means of a force reduced to the portier and two unaccomplished bell-boys, with a rapidly waning visitors' list.

Anton's drive back was by a shorter route than that by which he had brought his passengers, and it was pricked by haste—the awful, ruthless, calculated haste of war. Hans and Gretel must now put forth those reserves which had been undrawn upon on the way over. Armed men stopped Anton, made inquiries, and passed him on. He paused voluntarily only for food and rest necessary for man and beast, and in the inn-yards soldiers tossed grim jests from one to another, or shouted peremptory orders, and there was no dallying over beer and cigarette. The tremors of hostility were troubling the crystalline beauty of the woods and fields, and only the mountains seemed to draw farther away from the tumult of quarrel, and, flushed with violet and with pearl, to turn the shoulder of their strange, barren, dream-like inaccessibility to the clamor of the wrath of man. One wonders if to the limited equine intuitions of Hans and Gretel there penetrated any sense of a coming struggle. Did their instinct tempt them to start and swerve at the presence of the wild beast lurking unleashed, but unseen, in the forest that bordered their path? In all probability they caught nothing of the melancholy of farewell to the sunny road over which they had fared so gayly. The war-horse, like the militarist, snuffs the battle from afar, and reck's little of present happiness in the prospect of the fierce contest of the brute.

Through his village of Gnadenfest Anton drove, without a word of parley on the way, straight to his own door. Indeed, there was little for which to pause; there were no gay groups of haymakers; only here and there a lonely figure raking listlessly in the late afternoon. It was as if, in the brief interval, a veil of something

filmy yet constricting had settled down upon the land, something that muffled and shrouded without darkening or obliterating. War had come into the quiet valley, not as a stimulant, but as an anodyne.

Elsabetta saw him coming and ran out to the stable to meet him.

"They have been sent for, Anton," she cried, throwing her arms about him, "but, Gott sei dank, not you, not you!"

"They have been sent for?" he repeated dully. "Already?" And he looked at Hans and Gretel as if for explanation, as they stood shaking their heads, gently impatient to be rid of the harness they had carried long enough for one day.

"Yes," sobbed Elsabetta, "already," and she laid her head on Hans's brown coat while her deft fingers unbuckled a strap with a touch that was a caress.

"So—o!" breathed Anton, in a long, low exclamation. "And they must go at once—hein?"

"To-morrow," sighed Elsabetta. "It is within—the order. You will see." Slowly Anton walked about the splendid creatures, unharnessing, petting, admonishing, as if for the first time examining every buckle, testing every strap, mute under the magnitude of the blow that had fallen. Elsabetta watched him, her eyes brimming still with tears, murmuring now and then a fond word to Hans or Gretel.

"But not you, Anton," she said at last.

"Ach, nein, not I!" he replied half-impatiently. All his anxieties were concentrated upon the two grateful animals, whinnying in pleasure, their smooth coats tended to glossiness, their strong limbs scarcely wearied by the long drive. He had thought only for them—none to spare even for Elsabetta, just now. "Not already. Time enough for that," he added.

"Nein! nein!" cried Elsabetta in her turn, but in a different note—a sharp cry of protest. "Thou hast told me that this time thou art not called out—that—"

"And so I tell thee again," he answered with what was not meant for brusqueness. "But Hans and Gretel—yes! Aber," and he turned back as he led Gretel into her stall, "they will come back! I tell thee they will come back!"

"Yes, yes," assented Elsabetta gladly, "they will come back," and Hans docilely followed her to his appointed place as she

spoke, "and without a scratch—well, perhaps—it may be, a little scratch—to show that he has fought for Austria, like our Colonel Austerburg—but that is all—is it not true, Hans?"

Never had Hans and Gretel looked better than the next morning when they were ready to be driven to the rendezvous. As Elsabetta stood waiting to see them start, they turned their heads and looked at her, as if in conscious demand for an acknowledgment of their beauty—of how satin were their coats, how scrupulously combed their manes, and how polished the shoes that were to ring upon the hard, white road. As for Anton, he walked round and about them, searching in vain for a shabbiness or a flaw.

"The general himself, he will ride one, I think," said Elsabetta, wiping away with her apron a tear which had snatched a moment's inadvertence to course down her brown cheek.

"I wish it would be the Kaiser, von Deutschland!" said Anton, with a sudden flash of anger such as seldom illumined the calm resourcefulness of his temperament. "Then Hans, he would be quite safe!"

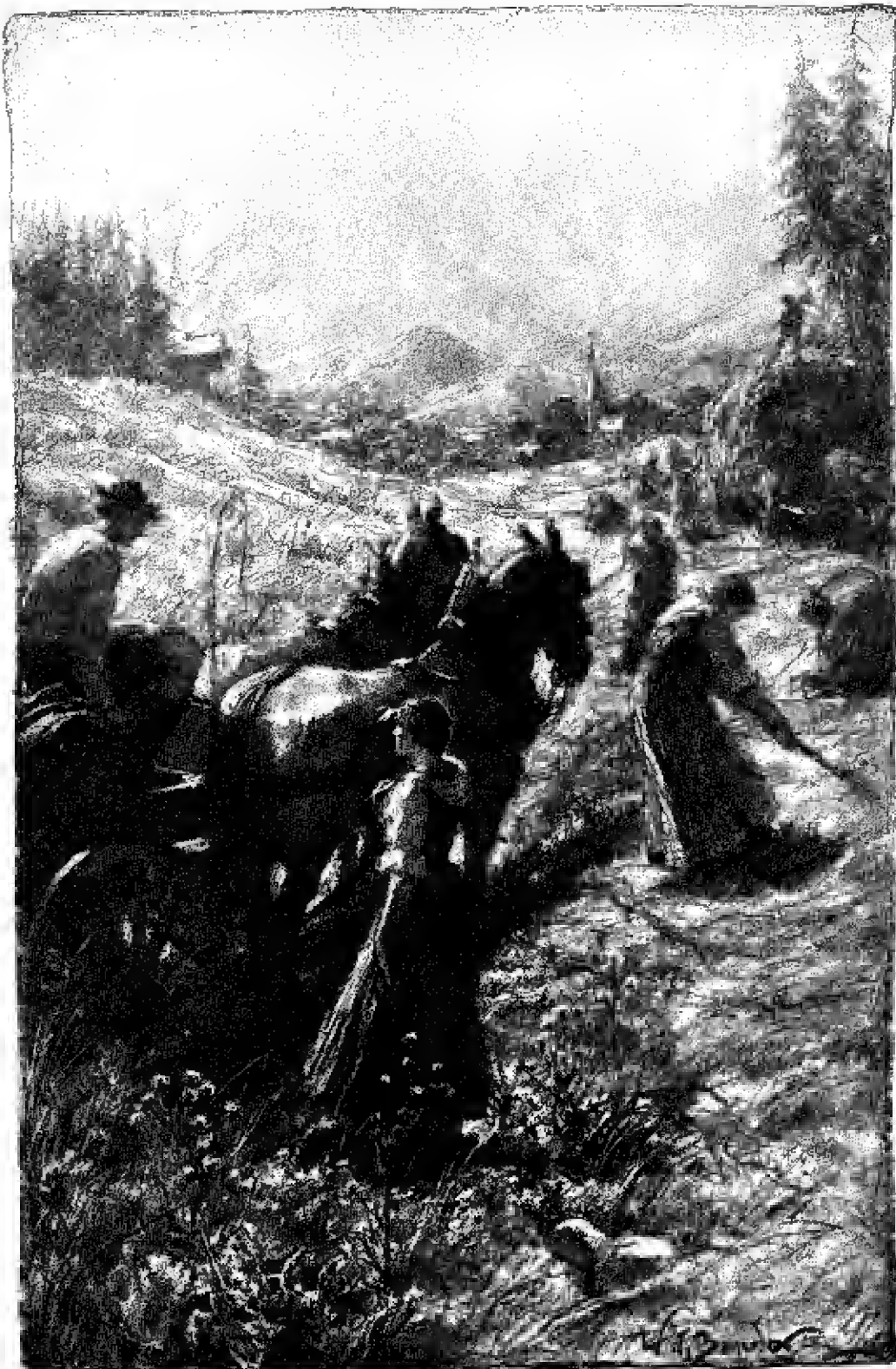
"Aber, Anton," said Elsabetta with alarmed compunction. "The German Kaiser—he is a brave man."

"Ja, ja, freilich," muttered Anton. "Brave! for others—yes. But I have not said that he was not a brave man," he added lamely. "Only it would be an honor for Hans to carry him. It is that—yes."

"Or Gretel," said Elsabetta.

"Or Gretel—schön," nodded Anton with a return to the soft, smiling speech which had so won the Amerikanerinnen.

"See," and Elsabetta came nearer. "I have put here a little, little knot of ribbon, where it will never show—seest thou, Anton?—even the sergeant, he will not see it—in the mane of Hans and of Gretel—so that if one saw them, perhaps—if they were riderless—or hurt—why one could find that blue ribbon and shall say—'Sehen Sie an—that is the ribbon of Elsabetta, the Frau of Anton'—is it not true?" and the gayety of her laughter, though it may have been dangerously near the border-land, sought to dispel the hint of tragedy.



Drawn by W. T. Benda.

"Get in, and I will take you home to give me a bit of Mittagessen,"—Page 624.



"He begins early to save his horses," said one of the Americans.—Page 636.

"You are always a child," grumbled Anton with what tried to be disapproval, "always die Kleine. I should take it out—but so! who would see?—no, I leave it—it makes nothing. Ade, Elsabetta, auf Wiedersehen."

And walking proudly at their heads, though the pain of parting tugged sharply at his heart-strings, with the downy feather in his Jaegerhut flickering a little in the breeze, his horses following spiritedly but obediently, Anton led the way to the rendezvous of dumb recruits. Thus, with all their silken flanks in garlands dressed, Hans and Gretel went through the little town to the sacrifice—to plunge, with their shining coats, their docile strength, their ignorant gayety, into the horrible vortex of inhuman battle—of an inhumanity far below the cruelties of the beast, in that it was coldly directed by human brains and human hands, and trained by human craft to maim, to torture, and to kill. It was not so many days after—those were days in which things happened fast—first, the declarations of war, one after another, sharp, decisive, like the reports of guns heard round the world—that battle itself drew near; fighting, fierce, lustful, devilry incarnate, deciding nothing, achieving nothing, horribly effective, supremely ludicrous in its folly; eager,

tragic as life, vapid, vain, purposeless as hell.

And very early, as it chanced, the regiment in the neighborhood of Gnadenfest was engaged in active warfare. They fought their first fight and met with heavy loss, and the field was left in its horror of torture, mutilation, and the unburied dead. The hurricane of the wrath of man passed over it and left a devastation to which the mercy of God could only send his swift angel of death.

"Elsabetta," said Anton, the second day after, "I am going to see where they fought the battle. Isidor Gansbuch is going, and he gives me a seat in his cart. Isidor's Lena was too old to be commandeered," he added with a flash of the disdain of the owner of Hans and Gretel, "and lame—wirklich—a little lame."

"Yes, Anton," said Elsabetta submissively. "It will take some time with Isidor's Lena," she added almost timidly; "for you it will be something different."

"Different? Ach, ja," answered Anton morosely. "But I shall go," he concluded doggedly.

"Ja, freilich," she rejoined quickly. "It may be, too, that you would find—would see—"

"Nothing, nothing," he interrupted, as if resenting the quickness of her compre-

hension. "What would there be for me to see? We have there no brothers and sons."

"That is true," agreed Elsabetta as if on second thoughts; "my brother, he is far to the north, is it not? And"—she

are strong, and they have gone far with our army by this time—and our men, do they not know a good horse when they see him?—they will look after Hans. But," he added, "I go with Isidor to see the battle-field. It will, perhaps, be my



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paused an instant, and then went on with the little laugh which she meant to make one of gay confidence—"as for Hans, I think the prince has him by this time—and Gretel, would she not be for the colonel himself?"

"Ja, ja," said Anton, but without the quick smile which had endeared him to the Americans. "He has ridden him to safety, I believe. Hans and Gretel, they

turn next," he concluded under his breath. But Elsabetta heard him.

"Nein, nein, Anton!" she cried aloud.

"But if it is for the Vaterland," he said without enthusiasm, as if repeating a well-worn formula.

"For the Vaterland!" she began mutinously, and then checked herself as Anton rose and went out without speaking. Her eyes filled with tears—tears were

so much nearer Austrian eyes these last weeks than they had ever been. Anton had changed already. With his horses had gone his occupation, and for him and Elsabetta what had been the poetry of their existence. With Hans and Gretel, there had been always something—if it were not the homely cares of feeding and watering and grooming, there had been their beauty and their strength, and their manifest superiority to talk about. There had been the long drive over the mountains to plan for, and the shorter drives into the glory of the forests; there had been the personality of the travellers to discuss, and the inspiration of intercourse with other villagers and other wayfarers; there had been the breath of the high peaks and the cold, clear stimulant of the glaciers. Then, besides these deprivations, there was now the question of money. Where was that to come from? They had a moderate sum laid up, to be sure—there was no immediate hardship—but food was already less plenty—and Elsabetta's eyes grew more anxious as they watched Anton pass the door of the empty stable—if he was to spend all his time at the village Gasthaus, smoking cigarettes and drinking beer, how was more money to be earned?

Certainly Isidor's lame Lena made slow work of the trip to the battle-field, and the two men stopped overnight on the way, in a melancholy wayside inn, where two women and a small boy did all the work which had been done by a landlord and two sturdy assistants. On the third day they reached the scarred and broken level, where a hastily dug trench, shattered tree-trunks, and a ruined mill testified to a recent engagement, and dotting its irregular surfaces were ghastlier witnesses. Merciful and patriotic hands had done what they could, but it had not been enough. It had been one of the least episodes of a titanic struggle, this skirmish in a secluded Austrian valley. A body of men hastening to join a large force had been surrounded and cut off after a sharp resistance—an affair hardly worth a bulletin in the official reports. But had the same suffering and the same toll of death been the burden of a day of peace, a sympathetic world would have paused long enough in its avocations for a sigh of horror. As the two men climbed out of

the cart they paused a moment as they stood, for the first time, face to face with the savage irony of war. In the distance the flush of the setting sun lay upon the Rosengarten, and the strange, carved monoliths of the dolomites held themselves austere aloof, while faintly to the ear came the sound of the pallid waters from the depths of forests touched in turn by the blackening hand of destruction. And scattered here and there, indistinguishable in detail, but appallingly significant in suggestion, were grim, motionless forms amid the more trivial confusion of torn and shattered accoutrements and splintered guns. There lay many horses still unburied, dumb, helpless creatures who had never known even the savage lust of killing, nor yet the warm thrill of a responsive patriotism—condemned to death before the trumpet of war had even sounded—their names called, their days numbered, the bounds of their existence set—sealed unto death by the official tape of militarism while yet they breathed the scent of hay-filled meadows and tossed their heads in the pleasure of mountain highways.

Slowly the two men made their stumbling way over the ridges of the field—leaving Isidor's Lena standing unambitiously in the road, not uncontented with her hampered fate, had she but known. Suddenly Anton paused a second time, while his heart gave a quick throb, and a rush of something hot and swift seemed to blind him for seconds before he realized that he was looking down at Hans, stretched out in a mutilated and tortured death. For an appreciable instant he tried to think that there was a mistake, but revelation had been too direct, he knew too well every line and muscle that he had followed with the faithful carefulness of love. The skin was no longer satin, its gloss had vanished long since, and there were marks of other hardship than those of the hideous shrapnel; but as Anton dropped on his knees and dragged toward him the lifeless head, not for a moment did he doubt that it was that of his beloved Hans. It was hardly worth while to put his hand under the uncombed mane and find still unwound, amid all the fury of onset and defeat, the bit of blue ribbon that Elsabetta, only half in jest, had twisted there to identify the gallant charger of a victorious commander.



Anton did not answer.

"Du lieber Gott!" exclaimed Isidor in heavy-hearted wonder, "it is, indeed, thy Hans."

Anton did not answer. Slow tears came into the eyes that looked down at the glazed and tragic sightlessness of his dear companion, and his strong, brown fingers pulled aimlessly at the little scrap of ribbon. He must get it for Elsabetta, he said to himself, he must get that for Elsabetta. Isidor moved on a step or two and then paused again, looked over at Anton as if about to speak, but did not. Finally he broke the silence.

"Anton," he said, "is it not that this is thy Gretel? See here."

Anton did not rise, but he leaned forward on hands and knees and scanned the dead animal as it lay stretched out near Hans.

"Ja, ja," he said heavily. "That is Gretel. Why should it not be? But she is so thin—I might not have known. And Hans—how he is thin, too!"

"There is not a scratch on her," said Isidor as he, too, knelt down to examine her. "It is, I think"—and again he hesitated—"that she has starved. One says, you know, that they were never fed, the horses. What is the use?" he went on with the bitterness of the helpless. "They are sure to be killed—is it not so? Why give them food and water?"

Anton pulled himself to his feet slowly, like a man that has been stunned, and came nearer to Isidor and Gretel.

"So—o!" he breathed between his closed teeth. "They gave them neither food nor water, and they drove them into the fight!" He spoke brokenly, as if it were difficult to find the words. The Americans would not have recognized the Anton of the soft voice and the ready speech had they seen him standing there, his Jaegerhut over his bitter eyes, his big fingers twisting and untwisting the pitiful knot of blue ribbon while he gazed down at the scarred fields and off to the freshness of the hills that was never again to breathe upon him and Hans and Gretel, and down again to the ground at his feet. "So! They were good enough to be killed, Hans and Gretel, but not to feed nor to water. No, she has not a scratch—Gretel; Hans, he was hit, was it not?—but Gretel, not a scratch—but she was weak—she was used, you see, to food and water—hein? I must tell Elsabetta," he repeated, still twisting about the tiny spot of blue. Then suddenly, in the half-affrighted presence of Isidor, and over the bodies of those companions to whom his voice had been like that of their maker, Anton lifted up an exceeding bitter cry and cursed the lord of war.